Curtains in the Wind
by Jonathan Olvera

This heartfelt story captures the quiet resilience of youth in a time when hard work and humble beginnings shaped a young man's dreams. Set against the backdrop of a new frontier, it reflects the tender longing of a young colored boy whose admiration for a Nephite girl blooms gently, yet bravely, within the unspoken barriers of race and circumstance. Their connection, though subtle, speaks volumes about hope, dignity, and the timeless ache of first love.

I was a young man in the 'new' territory—part hopeful, part desperate, but entirely eager to shape a path that fit the dreams I carried like stones in my pockets. The days were long, and I relished them. There was something noble in toil, in watching the sun arc across a sky too big to be owned, in feeling the sweat bead and drip from the brow while working toward something, even if it was just a clean path or a clearer patch of dirt.

The grass in the flats never grew too high, but its seed scattered wide and wild. One of my chores was to keep it from taking over, pulling roots from cracks, making room for order. In my spare hours, I turned to gardening, using old tools passed down or found left behind. With time, I saved enough for a pair of trousers —real sturdy ones with an overall loop that made me feel like I belonged somewhere. A spare shirt was never far, if I asked around kindly. I found ways to make shoes from scraps, and suddenly, I was moving stones and cleaning yards for pay.

“Fantastico!” I said to myself one morning, holding a little cash in hand. A few more weeks, and I could afford boots—the kind that clack on wood and grip the earth with confidence. I dreamed of putting them on with those trousers, shaving my head clean with a new razor, and striding into the month with purpose.

I lived in the yard of a relative, an Englishman, stern and busy. In a clearing behind his property, I’d put up four wooden posts and hung a curtain. That little space was mine. A cot lay hidden from the view of the main house by a picket fence, and there was always a bucket of water and a bar of soap nearby. I had two wash rags and a routine: wake early, wash up, dress with care, and work wherever I could.

Every week, I gave my friend some money for the stay. It wasn't much, but it mattered to me. I wanted to live with dignity.

Evenings were my joy. The warm breeze kissed my skin just before dusk. I'd sit quietly, gazing at the stars peeking through purple clouds, and listen to the soft rustle of dry grass. The air smelled of earth and wind, sometimes of bread baking in a far-off home.

Then came the visitors.

They were men looking to buy property—flats to build homes and dreams of their own. With them came young women in woven sun dresses, their voices light, laughter like birdsong. They moved across the fields with grace and carried themselves like flowers swaying to invisible music.

I watched them from the corner of my fence, hidden in shadow, heart thudding like a drum. I had never seen such beauty up close. One night, I lay on my cot and stared at the curtain swaying gently, thinking of their voices, their smiles. I longed to be more than a worker, more than a boy behind a curtain. I longed to be seen.

On my morning walks to the business up the dirt path, I began to greet them—these sunlit people. A tip of the hat, a polite smile. In time, they smiled back. One of them, a girl, began to speak with me. She was Nephite, as she described herself, with fair skin that shimmered like soft moonlight. Her eyes were curious, her laugh sincere.

"I'd be glad to introduce you to some of my friends," she said once, brushing a strand of hair from her cheek.

I froze. No one had offered that before.

She knew I was colored. I knew her friends might not approve. But something in the way she looked at me—steady and kind—made me believe. She didn’t look through me. She saw me.

We kept talking, sometimes near the edge of the fields, sometimes by the old stone wall on the road to the business. She told me about the city, about books and songs I had never heard. I told her about my work, my plans, my dream to one day own a small plot of land.

I wanted to invite her to my place, behind the curtain, past the picket fence. I wanted to show her that I kept myself clean, that I worked hard, that I had dreams like any man. But I was afraid. Not of her—but of the world that might judge her for choosing me.

That night, I washed my hands twice. I brushed my cot clean. I lit a candle I had been saving and set it on the ledge by my bed. The curtain rustled as the wind passed through, like a breath waiting to be spoken.

I wondered if she would come.

I wondered if the world would ever be soft enough for people like us—two souls meeting across invisible fences.

She never said yes or no. But the next day, she pressed a small note into my palm. It was a page from a book, a poem about love being brave.

I still have it.

Sometimes, I stand in the clearing where my cot used to be, long since taken down. The posts are gone. But I remember the breeze, the grass, the way my heart leapt when I saw her dress catch in the wind.

And I remember that curtain, waving like hope.